



SERIES SOCIO-ECONOMY OF SOLIDARITY

# Ethical Consumption

PROPOSAL PAPERS FOR THE XXI<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY - CHARLES LEOPOLD MAYER EDITIONS

# Proposal papers for the 21<sup>th</sup> century

*The proposal papers are a collection of short books on each decisive area of our future, which assemble those proposals that appear the most capable of bringing about the changes and transformations needed for the construction of a more just and sustainable 20<sup>th</sup> century. They aim to inspire debate over these issues at both local and global levels.*

The term 'globalisation' corresponds to major transformations that represent both opportunities for progress and risks of aggravating social disparities and ecological imbalances. It is important that those with political and economic power do not alone have control over these transformations as, trapped within their own short-term logic, they can only lead us to a permanent global crisis, all too apparent since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the United States.

This is why the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World (see appendix) initiated, in 2000-2001, a process of assembling and pinpointing proposals from different movements and organisations, different actors in society and regions around the world. This process began with electronic forums, followed by a series of international workshops and meetings, and resulted in some sixty proposal texts, presented at the World Citizen Assembly held in Lille (France) in December 2001.

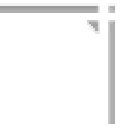
These texts, some of which have been completed and updated, are now in the process of being published by a network of associative and institutional publishers in 6 languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Arabic and Chinese) in 7 countries (Peru, Brazil, Zimbabwe, France, Lebanon, India, China). These publishers work together in order to adapt the texts to their different cultural and geopolitical contexts. The aim is that the proposal papers stimulate the largest possible debate in each of these regions of the world and that they reach their target publics whether they be decision-makers, journalists, young people or social movements.

# Presentation of the Paper

## « Ethical Consumption »

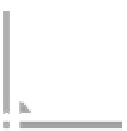
The acceleration of the production cycle and the use of natural raw materials, added to the enormous amount of waste generated throughout the process, is leading the system towards a growing entropy, which in the long-term represents “ecocide”, the gradual destruction of the environment, which is the basis for human life. This is the violent, unconcerned and irresponsible side of the vicious circle of production and consumption with regards to the environment and to man himself, particularly the generations of the future.

Consumption is good for society providing that it is environmentally sustainable and socially fair and tends to improve the quality of life. We examine the field of ethics with a view to suggesting alternatives to the commercialisation of life created by market logic. Alternatives that become a development model based on sustainable criteria and applicable to most of the world’s population, which is in an extremely vulnerable situation. This means re-considering values like health, personal happiness and environmental preservation as part of the economy. Ethics have to be a key concept and require a completely new approach.



# Ethical Consumption

Paper coordinated by Flávia Soares and Nelson Diehl



# I – OBSERVATIONS AND DIAGNOSIS

## Reflections on contemporary consumer culture

The starting point for understanding how consumerism has become a model for contemporary society is the rise of modern bourgeoisie and urban and industrial capitalism. The end of World War I saw the industrialisation of domestic work and female factory labour. The end of World War II signalled the explosion of mass consumption and the start of the age of the “American Dream”, with constant growth of the domestic consumption market, particularly due to television, which was responsible for transmitting this new life-style. In the eighties, the growing internationalisation of markets and capital led to the consumer society, which originated to a large extent in the United States, extending outside its borders, with standard products and symbols practically all over the world and in almost all languages. The contemporary globalisation process thus transmitted to most parts of the world, through communication technology and the media, the diffusion of a consumption-oriented, individualistic and timesaving culture.

There has been a surprising transformation of the media (sophistication of advertising techniques, increased production scale and diversification of the written press, the radio, the television, films, the record industry and the Internet), explaining how the media increased their power of seduction to encourage a greater consumption of goods and services. But in spite of the impact of modern technical resources, capable of generating images and world-wide communication in real time, it is fair to note that this process is easier wherever passive and non-critical mentalities abound.

Since society only values economic factors, it creates indicators such as gross national product, the balance of payment or consumer indexes, in order to evaluate people’s quality of life and welfare. A new index has recently been introduced, the HDI (Human Development Index), based on more humane criteria. Nature is considered to be the only raw material. It is a natural good that is primarily linked to economic factors and therefore commercial value (minerals and biodiversity, for example). Contemplation of nature in all its beauty has been relegated into second place in a race won by market value. Ecosystems are destroyed to obtain a specific mineral or to create plantations of a single tree species for commercial purposes.

From man’s perspective, this process is reflected in a growing superficiality and alienation from each individual’s potential degree of freedom, which is what allows us to create and become involved in reality. On the one hand, this is due to the idea created by advertising that happiness lies in unlimited private consumption and, on the other, to the urgent need to acquire and obtain things that transforms time into a series of isolated moments characterised by a permanent lack of satisfaction and desire for the consumption still to come. In fact, modern market economy requires “individuals inasmuch as consumers” to live in a permanent state of subjective deprivation caused by consumer goods, even in those societies that have managed to overcome basic material shortages. The speed with which the market discards disposable and short-term products, which fuels the cycles of constant renewal in the production system, together with a permanent “innovation” copying superficial fashions that ensures the

“programmed obsolescence” of others (small changes in design, technology or style that make recently acquired products obsolete), keeps this cycle moving. Products do not last and they are cheap, thus encouraging a constant search for new ones. In general, nothing is repaired, because it is easier to throw things away and buy new ones. Preservation and recycling are only for saving at times of crisis. But in addition to this short-term disposal, there is also an immediate disposal of products that have been manufactured for a single use, such as plastic drinking glasses or PET bottles, creating a serious environmental problem. The dissociation between production and consumption, added to the preference given to the intermediate processes in the production chain (marketing, transport, sales, distribution), generates a growing volume of non-treatable waste.

The acceleration of the production cycle and the use of natural raw materials, added to the enormous amount of waste generated throughout the process, is leading the system towards a growing entropy, which in the long-term represents “ecocide”, the gradual destruction of the environment, which is the basis for human life. This is the violent, unconcerned and irresponsible side of the vicious circle of production and consumption with regards to the environment and to man himself, particularly the generations of the future.

## **The “Modernisation of Poverty”**

The “modernisation of poverty” concept (Illich, 1978) refers to an impoverishment of the mental and operational capacity to face daily problems, which ends up transformed into a need to consume. When this type of poverty is predominant, there is a gradual loss of the individual and general capabilities that used to exist and be used to satisfy certain basic needs. Therefore, modern society has become increasingly dependent on selling and buying processes, with currency as the middle-man. This is another consequence of the priority given to the market, more important than life itself, which has reduced the time spent on things that do not produce more money, such as, for example, the time spent with the family, with friends or the community, or the time spent enjoying nature. This finally simplifies how things work.

The destitution of each individual’s inherent capabilities is not only limited to daily life and concrete areas (education, health, etc.) but affects his/her knowledge of the world. Worker-spectator-consumers consent to this process, in practice, by failing to analyse the facts critically. They therefore give up their own understanding of the world. They finally see themselves as people lacking in whatever “those who know” and publicity identify as absolutely necessary. Increasingly robbed of their independence, modern man and woman gradually lose the ability to define their needs based on their own experience. This type of individual is searching for the freedom associated to satisfying their needs by consumption, forgetting that freedom does not represent having no needs but is man’s independence with regards to the needs that he defines for himself. This means understanding potential reality as a set of probabilities to be chosen from, and realising that freedom requires learning from one’s relationship with life. In this respect, we should mention the concept of abstract wealth (everything that one accumulates and is unable to enjoy), the value of which is inversely proportional to the degree of freedom. As an example, consider our own bodies: all foods or drinks that are consumed in excess lead to imbalance, entropy, disease and waste. This excess also implies



that others are unable to consume what we have consumed. Just like the body requires sufficient good quality food and drink, society reacts to the amount of products consumed. The results of these excesses are indigestion and anger. The ethical question “how much is enough”, in individual and collective terms, disappears with the economic ideology of modernity.

The limit between the concept of need (contingent demand/self-control) and desire (structurally insatiable/control of others) becomes increasingly weak because of the stimulation of the emotional need to buy, created by publicity. This “confusion” between the concepts of need and desire blinds us to our true needs and leads to the predominance of “foolish consumption” that disconnects us from our most important affections. In other words, the choice of an identity rooted in HAVING and not in BEING has made most contemporary societies media-oriented and superficial, separating image from content as never before, and condemning us to an empty existence.

Consumption, used as an important point of reference to understand many societies and ages, has now taken on the role of indicator with regards to the socialisation process. Contemporary society has advanced a great deal in the quality of life, but without a proportional increase in personal happiness and satisfaction, although we now have access to consumption that is four and a half times greater than at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with a larger range of technological commodities. In the race for more purchasing power, love, tolerance, responsibility, commitment, harmony and solidarity (basic factors for human satisfaction) are relegated to a back seat. The immediate and short-lived pleasure of consumption gives rise to a feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction that reinforces our dependence on external life styles, and increases the dehumanisation process. We are left with a feeling of indifference to life, which reveals the origin of contemporary discomfort and existential void, which leads to a desperate search in our new temples (shopping centres) for the miraculous solution: the satisfaction caused by consuming goods and services capable of relieving anguish and guaranteeing happiness.

## **Development and Inequality**

If we analyse the basic principles of the Fordist ideology, we suspect the presence of an alliance between the notion of welfare/happiness and unlimited private consumption: the desire to HAVE more and more. This justifies a growing and unlimited consumption, the basis for the capitalist system that makes world-wide promises of a development model that is identified as leading to the one and only civilisation.

Globalisation destroys whoever does not follow this dogma. It imports life-styles on behalf of self-justified “modernisation”. The decolonisation process, with the resulting increase of markets to consume the goods produced by the largest powers, subordinated Third World economies to a pact of dependence, based on the interiorisation of considerable negative self-criticism. These countries have been (and still are) supporting the growth of the great powers for centuries, which means that the current development model is based on a colonial system based on exploitation.

*"The life-styles of the rich countries of the north would never have been so high if the colonised south had not been so exploited. If all the work required to make the products sold in rich countries was paid at the rates paid to specialised workers in Germany, most of these products would be so expensive that only a minority could buy them. So called development, which Vandana Shiva identifies as "bad development", is not an evolving upward process, but a process of polarisation in which rich countries become richer at the cost of poor countries becoming poorer. 200 years ago, the western world was only 5 times richer than the poor countries today. In 1960, they were 20 times richer, and in 1983, 46 times richer. The wealth of the rich countries grows at an increasingly high rate in a limited world; this means that it is growing at the expense of the others that I still call 'colonies'. (Mies: 1991, p. 38).*

The difference between the North and the South is what Vandana Shiva defines as "bad development": a radicalisation of socio-economic inequality. This model is reproduced internally in Third World countries, with the polarisation of social classes and a concentration of the benefits obtained by exploiting misery.

For the countries in the South, the mirage of the consumption in the North is a promise that is never kept: an impossible dream because it can not be sustained by the planet. Most development plans designed by national and international agencies to import the benefits of the consumer society destroy traditional customs that provide social cohesion and worsen the living conditions in small communities. In addition to being naive, the current international economic order is profoundly unfair, since almost 20% of the world's population, living mainly in the countries in the North, lives immersed in waste and over-consumption, swiping 80% of all the material and energy produced each year on our planet. Meantime, a mass of over three billion people lives in misery, almost totally lacking material goods. In addition to being socially unsustainable, this situation fuels a model of civilisation that is also ecologically unsustainable, since it looms up as the future of the economy, a ne'er-do-well and unrealistic pattern of consumption in the face of our planet's objective limitations. A model which, for humanity as a whole, can not be democratised, since its existence in a very minority sector corresponding to a fifth of the population has been sufficient to undermine the Earth's capacity for sustenance.

Although they are not greatly publicised, there are initiatives, however, that may belong to the social or environmental spheres and that give priority to native cultural practice and values as a means of survival.

## II – VISIONS AND NEW PARADIGM

To criticise consumerism is also to criticise productivism, that is the unsustainable volume of disposable goods, produced and consumed on a daily basis by our society, reducing the environment and even man himself to the category of merchandise. Consumption is good for society providing that it is environmentally sustainable and socially fair and tends to improve the quality of life.

We examine the field of ethics with a view to suggesting alternatives to the commercialisation of life created by market logic. Alternatives that become a development model based on sustainable criteria and applicable to most of the world's population, which is in an extremely vulnerable situation. This means re-considering values like health, personal happiness and environmental preservation as part of the economy. Ethics have to be a key concept and require a completely new approach.

If we accept this challenge, we must define the concept of Ethical Consumption for the purpose of this document.

Although this concept originated from a criticism of the consumer society, it is important to mention that the debate that related consumption with ethical positions is very recent. The theoretical basis is therefore still incomplete. The very name of "ethical consumption" is still an open issue, and varies from ethical consumption to consumption in solidarity, responsible consumption, and fair consumption. All these multiple in-depth theoretical and practical discussions will enrich the subject and make for a better assessment.

We will attempt to present some views of this issue that are being discussed in the current debates.

The idea of "ethical consumption" should initially be based on a definition of ethics. For those who understand the concept of Ethics as the definition of criteria to identify Good and Evil, it is important for the concept of Ethical Consumption to include another idea of consumption that is not based on individualism. The word that best defines this relationship with the rest of the world is "solidarity". It qualifies it and defines the importance of others in the ethical values on which consumption is based. In this case we are talking about "ethical consumption in solidarity".

There is also a simplified version called "consumption in solidarity", which appears in the literature referring to consumption that not only considers our personal welfare but also considers general welfare. This is a consumption in which production is completed, generating an impact on the ecosystem and society in general. Under this idea, the choice of type of consumption can benefit or hinder the creation or maintenance of the productive jobs in a specific society, the preservation of ecosystems and the promotion of the general welfare of communities, countries and the entire planet.

"Responsible consumption" (an expression used in Europe, particularly in France), appears where there is an awareness of the power of consumers, which become economic units with an important role to play, just as important as businesses and market regulatory boards. It implies an idea of economy that wishes to provide answers to citizens who belong to an economic and political world that considers man as a mere

consumer. In this respect, consuming in a different way represents paying attention to what the money that we give to buy goods and services is financing, thus bringing economic pressure to bear from below that compensates the regulatory pressure that comes from above. It also represents taking steps to obtain access to clear information promoting the evolution of the law and bringing pressure to bear on companies so that everyone has the means to consume good quality products all over the world.

There are, therefore, more complex and detailed expressions (three or more terms) together with more direct and simple phrases to define this concept clearly.

For the purpose of this document, we will provisionally be using Ethical Consumption (the original name of this discussion in the Socio-Economics in Solidarity workshop), defining ethics as a set of values based on responsibility to oneself, to others and to the environment being the central point of all our actions in life. It includes, therefore, respect for the limits of nature and man himself, acknowledgement of the earth as the source of life, co-responsibility for society, and the acknowledgement of the rights of others to access the resources and products that are necessary for a dignified quality of life (which means that all the relations, services, products and ideas for ethical consumption have to be considered within a framework of the full citizenship that guarantees individuals' material, political, educational, informative and ethical rights). Ethical consumption is also defined as the purchase and/or use of the goods, services or ideas that are based on this ethical concept.

The purpose of Ethical Consumption, then, is the reconstitution of man's habits to create a qualitative improvement in working conditions, the environment, health and education by encouraging an ecologically prudent and socially fair life-style.

But how can we talk about ethical consumption in the different contexts of the wealthiest populations and the people who live in less than humane conditions? How can it mean the same thing for those who have dominated civilisation and for those who have been dominated? This first analysis is essential for the debate on ethical consumption not to be restricted to an elitist and academic discussion, unrelated to the circumstances of most of the world's population, which continues to pray for their basic necessities to be satisfied, such as food, housing, education, health services, etc.

We believe that ethical consumption for the upper or middle classes has to mean a reflection on and qualification of the act of consumption that includes ethics as a point of reference for individual or general consumption, to search for means of satisfaction that are ecologically and socially feasible, and thus eliminate others that degrade the environment and man himself. In fact, it also means a need to consume fewer materials and less energy both on an individual and a collective level, especially when those materials are used in the production of superfluous infrastructures that are of very limited use. This need to consume less is justified because the planet is finite, and it becomes a requirement in order to guarantee the material needs of the majority of the population in an environment of limited resources.

On the other hand, the layers of society that do not have their basic necessities covered see how their freedom of choice is restricted, and how they occasionally, in situations of absolute misery, have no freedom of choice at all. According to the information in the latest report issued by the UN Human Development Programme, entitled *Consumption for Human Development*, we can see that whereas 20% of the richest people on the planet are responsible for 86% of private consumption spending, 20% of the poorest are only responsible for 1.3% (over one billion people do not have their bare necessities covered). At this point, we believe that it is of vital importance for

the State and civil society to guarantee a minimum level, so that the individuals beneath that level can urgently overcome their present conditions of survival and reflect and assess their future. In this new position, it will also be important to qualify consumption, in as much as the effects of advertising and marketing generally encourage the idealisation of a consumer life-style that has no respect for culture, local customs or ethical positions. If we are not capable of providing this minimum level, the debate on ethical consumption will be hypocritical for that part of humanity that struggles to survive in a life with no perspectives. We should remember that dissatisfied consumer desires can explode into irrational and inhuman acts of violence against the society that creates them.

But what would happen if our reflections on consumption became actions? In this kind of situation, the negative impact on the economy, and therefore on employment, would have to be considered. The possibilities include the consumption of products and services generated by an economy based on solidarity, with the benefits distributed among society. With this perspective, consumption consolidates the production alternatives proposed by communities and social organisations, creating more employment and a fairer distribution of wealth.

It is possible to imagine that a critical awareness of consumption in itself could reduce the amount of exclusive economic benefits, re-distributing resources for other types of production that could develop a suitable social and environmental technology capable of creating wealth for more people.

### III- INITIATIVES AND INNOVATIONS

For there to be mobilisation and awareness initiatives for ethical consumption, we believe that it is essential to act in two spheres: education and information.

Education to encourage critical minds that defend ethics respecting and accepting liability before others. It is therefore essential for formal educational system programmes and professional training plans to include ethical consumption and a critical study of advertising, to encourage class and family discussions. A prior requisite for this process is training for teachers (both new and recycled staff) to enable them to cover this subject in the classroom.

Information is also necessary for consumers to choose whom they are supporting with their consumption. Are we supporting the slavery used by the companies hired by multinational firms, or are we helping small initiatives to become more involved in the social and environmental spheres? Who do we distinguish between these products? How can we know if the lipstick we are buying is soiled by the hunger of the women in Bihar or the torture suffered by thousands of guinea pigs and mice in laboratories? How do we learn about the toxic effects of mobile phone batteries? What do the radiations from electronic equipment do to the environment?

Globalisation, by fragmenting the productive processes in the countries that provide more comparative advantages, disguises the exploitation involved in product manufacture, since international outsourcing make it difficult to monitor the process, even when the companies concerned boast that they are ecologically correct. However, it is essential to discover the exploitation inherent to different products on sale in order to convert market relationships into specific personal relationships. This implies a learning process that questions the relationships that we establish between our work and our lives, and the exploitation inherent to the products that we consume. This also broadens the concept of subjective freedom that we all have, increasing our independence based on a general knowledge of the nature, history and life in other countries, encouraging rejection of business manipulations.

As for initiatives, we can consider the publication of this kind of information using organisations or movements related to different areas (women, the environment, race and workers) with pamphlets, campaigns, educational videos, etc. We also have the option of using existing means of communication (the Internet, universities, social movements, etc.) to create mechanisms to obtain information, create campaigns, offer information and encourage debates that provide general information in the type of relationships that are established as the direct result of individualistic consumption. One fundamental strategy consists of the generation of alternative means of interaction with the productive processes, such as the distribution of the product, social organisation, data processing, consumption levels and models, etc., that require a responsible learning process in solidarity with life, consolidating knowledge that is committed to the search for solutions, not only in theory but also in practice. The systematic use of this information can be used to make better decisions on what we need and what we can do without, and to know whom we are helping when we consume.

Another important point is the systematic use of the information of initiatives based on solidarity in different parts of the country and the world, so that consumers have easier and quicker access to these products and services, by creating distribution channels (phone deliveries, independent fairs, etc.), to consolidate and reinforce these initiatives in the networks of collaboration in solidarity (not regulated by market laws, but by fair prices). It is therefore fundamental to permanently obtain updated information on these initiatives to include them in existing databases. These databases will then become real information channels that can be used on a large scale for ecologically sustainable and socially fair consumption.

## IV - PROPOSALS

The challenge that we are facing consists of changing a model where there are no limits for the self-regulated market and economy is based on the accumulation and unlimited consumption of material goods. To change this culture implies a true social, economic, political, moral, cultural, intellectual and spiritual revolution. Introduce ethical consumption as a regular issue in union and social movement meetings, because they are also attended by consumers (individually and as a group, in the events that they organise), which can go one step further than reporting specific cases, considering their practices and struggles (struggles to consume more or to consume ethically?) by daily local activities based on the network in order to multiply the effects.

Reduce the existence of radical social inequalities stemming from the organisation of another form of economy and consumption. This process has to evolve slowly from the gradual strengthening of the transversal networks that apply ethics to daily consumption, attracting political support. This network of activities has to involve the productive and economic spheres, the State, social movements and each individual. We shall now go on to present, in a synthetic manner, some proposals for each of these aspects:

- 1- Promote the paradigm of responsible and conscious consumption. – Encourage debate on the ecological and human consequences of the consumption models, on a local national and global level, so as to build individual and collective patterns that do not damage the collective environment or future generations or the democratised attention of human requirements. In other words, patterns that strengthen equity, sustainability and the quality of life.
- 2- Encourage a break with the paradigm that associates consumerism with personal fulfilment. – Assign value to the means of satisfying the needs for a “good life” that cannot be acquired commercially but which are gained through social coexistence, emotional exchanges and cultural identity. Question consumerism as a requirement of the production system in the age of mass capitalism and do not consider it as an instrument for personal fulfilment.
- 3- Promote democratic control of the advertising industry. - Create bodies to regulate advertising that include a good representation of organised civil society, that inhibit lies, manipulation of information and the creation of artificial needs. Denounce the subtle psychological mechanisms used in the advertising industry to mould desires and shortages in accordance with capital interests.
- 4- Increase public accountability and honesty in consumer information. – Create discussion and information centres, wide open to public opinion, that provide indicators and data on the quality of products and the environmental and social impact their production creates. Democratise the procedure of establishing prices and production costs of products and services, thus allowing the consumer to intervene in the establishment of fair prices.
- 5- Strengthen the action of public power in promoting sustainable consumption. – Encourage the action of democratic governments so that



they can be important members, without centralising decisions on the regulation of the private sector and on the attention to the population's basic needs. Encourage the implementation of and compliance with the laws that guarantee consumers' rights and that adopt a precautionary principle in the liberalisation of products and services that are potentially harmful to the collective welfare. Establish fiscal/tax policies that encourage an economy of solidarity and penalise production systems favouring waste, pollution and social marginalization.

- 6- Strengthen ethical consumption in the production of the collective infrastructure. -Raise awareness and inform legislators, politicians and civil servants in general about the practices of ethical consumption, reducing the consumption of water, paper and energy, and change the public bidding laws to give priority to social and ecological criteria, planning and applying alternative forms of transport or energy that use sustainable technology.
- 7- Strengthen collective action against consumer goods, which promote injustice and unsustainability. Create an effective information network to promote campaigns and public action denouncing companies that exploit their workers or damage the environment so as to develop and strengthen international networks of united and conscious consumers to continue and collaborate in the co-ordination of national and regional movements for ethical consumption. Organise a collective boycott of products made by exploiting human beings, animals and nature, and also products and services in countries that promote wars or in those countries where there is no respect for human beings or the environment, even though these products may be cheaper.
- 8- Strengthen collective action in favour of beneficial and sustainable consumer goods. -Broadcast the benefits of the individual and collective options for ecologically correct products (with non-pollutant technologies, minimum and recyclable packaging, minimum energy consumption, etc.) and socially fair products (created through local production initiatives based on autonomy, co-operation, the correct distribution of income and the promotion of a dignified life for the workers).
- 9- Encourage attention, continually increasing, to social consumption requirements through an economy of solidarity. Systematise and broadcast up-to-date information on existing social acts so as to favour ethical options, facilitate exchanges and restructure production chains, in a complementary and social manner starting with consumption. Create retail outlets and distribution channels that maximise the direct relation between producer and consumer, helping to establish rich cultural and social relations as well as the simple exchange of goods.
- 10-Encourage a culture of ethical consumption-** Mobilise people and raise awareness on ethical consumption through education (to encourage critical mentalities and the defence of ethics that respect and shoulder responsibilities for others) and information (to allow for choice, selection, the power of the consumer, uncovering the exploitative relations inherent in retail goods) to discuss the organisation of the relations we establish in our work and our lives, and about exploitative relations in the products we consume. Introduce a critical reflection on the economy, advertising and consumption to the curricula of the formal education system, teacher training courses and professional training courses.

**11-Encourage the training of social agents committed to ethical consumption-** Introduce ethical consumption as an outline to follow in union and social movement meetings, since they are also consumers, to encourage the training, acting, strengthening and widening of associations of consumers, producers and networks of social collaboration. Value the family and, in particular women, as central agents for the training of citizens who practise consumption that is responsible with the social and ecological environment.

## V – STRATEGIES AND ACTORS

Consumption involves a large number of actors from our society, both political, social and economic. An effective process of society changes demands a positive synergy between these actors in relation to the ethical issue.

### **The individual**

There can be no true transformation of society without new individual attitudes. Based on the premise that the world has to be changed if it is to be improved, and that we wish the best for others and for ourselves, individuals have to accept the responsibility of changing themselves. And this means a critical consideration of what we each desire and, therefore, of what we consume. We have to change our habits by using new ecological means of satisfaction that are socially feasible. Aware and well-informed individuals are increasingly alert to the seduction of advertising and non-ethical consumer attitudes and are not deceived by the traps laid by advertising.

### **The Family**

The family is the most important organisation in society, since it is the first group in which individuals are integrated. It is in the family that individuals are formed, and where habits and attitudes are generated. It is therefore important to understand that ethical consumption is a value and a practice to be taught to our children, who will be the members of the society of the future. Those groups of families who live in the same community in the country or in our cities can get together to teach other groups about ethical consumption. Women are particularly important when it comes to respecting life and teaching citizens to practice social and ecologically responsible consumption, through educational and information programmes aimed at this segment of the population, which is capable of promoting practices that multiply healthy, sustainable and healthy consumer habits.

### **The Local Community**

The search for self-sustainable societies implies the search for a healthy, socially fair and ecologically sustainable life-style thanks to a gradual but significant growth of the power of individuals and families, by reinforcing and valuing community cultural relations and by means of individual behaviour adapted to a local scale. It is in the community where people effectively exercise their citizenship.

### **The State**

The State has to promote and distribute wealth. It has to be responsible for analysing and regulating how and where this wealth is generated and used, so that society is more equalitarian, paying attention to the entire population's basic health and educational needs. It has to act in an ethical manner when it consumes resources and allocated bids for new services. It also has to create and apply laws that benefit ethical products and services, applying environmental taxes to products that are harmful for health and for the environment.

## Supranational organisations

Considering the complexity of contemporary society, these seats of power and information must act to regulate the principles of sustainability on a global scale, based on a re-orientation of international co-operation with a view to obtaining more solidarity than aid. They will also object to the monopolistic approach to patents and dialogue with cultures, gaining an understanding of the customs of different nations and regions in the economic, social and ecological field, because the environmental impact of technology, trade, the financial system, information and the use of natural resources knows no borders.

## Associations and Co-operatives

Organised civil society exercises its power and citizenship most intensely in associations and co-operatives. Consumer associations, for example, are fundamental for guiding, educating and training consumers, and to promote alternative systems of production, trade and community services. They fight for the principle of precaution, which is a useful tool to prevent the introduction of high-risk technologies, such as genetic engineering, in agriculture and medicine. These associations can obtain and publish information that is not revealed or disguised on product labels. To introduce democracy into the information circulating in the economic system (production, trade, services) is the primary task of consumer associations, since the true owners of the information and knowledge only transmit what is of interest to them. These associations should bring the complexity of production to the consumer and vice versa. The system based on middle-men increases the distance between producers and consumers, and the more complicated it becomes, the easier it is to manipulate the intermediate agents (industry, trade, advertising, financial system, transport). Co-operatives, on the other hand, are economic organisations operating as democratic organisations, and they play an important role by creating co-operative networks that promote ethical consumption.

Some proposals were forthcoming in relation to strategies to continue the discussions and activities related to ethical consumption:

- All the participants in the electronic forums and the encounters who are involved with this subject will inform the organisations in their states/countries of their collaboration with the debates, in order to work on these proposals.
- Proposal to continue with the debate on ethical consumption with support for the maintenance of the web page (<http://consumption.socioeco.org>), to create a single page for all the debates on the other issues and that can be used both for the existing debates and for new lists focussed on continuing to discuss ethical consumption and thus be able to exchange impressions referring to positive experiences related to ethical consumption and other related subjects on the Internet.
- To strengthen and publish the databases on solidarity-based activities being carried out, together with updated local and national information, so that consumers have easy access to this kind of product.
- To support, organise and take part in ecological fairs and events designed for exchanging ideas on ethical consumption together with other organisations.

- To gather information for the preparation of an ethical consumption “code” (a synthetic document that can be distributed and associated to products, with a view to providing information on the concept and encouraging thinking and discussions).
- To make contact with institutions related to responsible tourism and the bank of solidarity, to obtain more aid to continue the debate and working in an organised fashion (for example, for consumers to boycott certain countries).

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# The Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World

## Working together towards the challenges of the 21<sup>th</sup> century

Ever since the late eighties of the 20th century, numerous initiatives have been put forward from different regions of the world and extremely diverse contexts. Different social actors were thus put in motion with the aim of organising a vast worldwide process seeking to explore values, proposals and regulations capable of overcoming the modern challenges humanity is faced with.

A large number of thematic, collegial and continental meetings were organised in the early nineties, a process which led, in 1993, to the drafting of the *Platform for a Responsible and United World*.

Regional groups were set up, international professional networks and thematic networks on the fundamental issues of our era were developed: the Alliance was created. It is financially and technically supported by the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the progress of Humankind (FPH), among others.

The Alliance is focussed on inventing new forms of collective action on both a local and global scale, with the aim of shaping together the future of an increasingly complex and interdependent world.

The challenge of the Alliance is to actively support unity in diversity by asserting our societies' capability to understand and appreciate the complexity of situations, the interdependence of problems and the diversity and legitimacy of geo-cultural, social and professional perspectives.

**The Alliance, as a space of discussion, reflection and proposals, is built around three main orientations:**

Local groups aiming to bring people of a community, a region, a country or a continent together by looking at the realities and issues of their own societies. This is the **geo-cultural approach**. It reflects the diversity of places and cultures.

Groups of socio-professional actors wishing to provoke dialogue and mobilisation within a given social sector or profession (youth, peasants, scientists, local representatives etc.). This is the **collegial approach**. It reflects the diversity of social and professional milieus, their concerns and responsibilities towards society and the challenges of today's world.

Thematic workshops seeking to create reflection groups centred around the major issues of our common future (sustainable water management, regional integration and globalisation, financial markets, art and society, etc.). This is the **thematic approach**. It reflects the diverse challenges humanity is faced

with in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thematic workshops are organised into four areas: Values and Culture, Economy and Society, Governance and Citizenship, Humanity and the Biosphere.

Seeking both to draw on the richness of materials and experiences gathered by these reflection groups whilst networking with other citizen dynamics with a similar focus, the Alliance fixed itself the objective of obtaining collectively developed, concrete proposals. The following meetings were thus organised:

- **international meetings**, for each thematic workshop and each college,
- **synchronized continental assemblies** (Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe) and a regional meeting in the Arab world (Lebanon) in June 2001.
- a **Citizen World Assembly**, held in December 2001 in Lille, France, bringing 400 participants together from around the world.

These meetings together contributed to the drafting of some sixty *Proposal Papers for the 20<sup>th</sup> century* and a *Charter of Human Responsibilities*, published in several languages in different countries.

The Alliance has been involved in a process of disseminating and developing these outcomes since the beginning of 2002. Networks are expanding, branching out and their work themes are becoming increasingly transversal. They also strengthen links with other approaches aiming to create an alternative globalisation.

For further information, please visit the **alliance website** at [www.alliance21.org](http://www.alliance21.org), where the history of the Alliance, the challenges it is engaged in and the workshops and discussion forums being held can be viewed in three languages (French, English and Spanish).

E-mail: [info@alliance21.org](mailto:info@alliance21.org)



# The proposal papers on the internet

Whether in their provisional or definitive form, all the proposal papers and their corresponding translations can be accessed on the website of the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World, at:

<http://www.alliance21.org/fr/proposals>

## Themes available:

### **Values, education, cultures, art and the sciences**

Teachers and education - Education to an active and responsible citizenship - The alliance and the media - Art and cultural identity in building a united world - Women - Youth action and proposals for social change - An intercultural cultural diversity in the era of globalisation - Proposals of the inter-religious college - War, genocide, ...restoring humanity in human beings faced by extreme situations - Thinking through university reform - Social control of the scientific production system - Information society, knowledge society: benefiting from change - time and sustainable development

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Transformations in the field of work - The trade-union movement at the dawn of the 21st century - Exclusion and Precariousness - Companies and solidarity - How can enterprises exercise their responsibility - Corporate responsibility - Production, technology and investment - Ethical consumption - Fiscal policy, tax, distribution of national income and social welfare - Social finance - Escaping the financial maze: Finance for the common good - Social money as a lever for the new economic paradigm - Debt and adjustment - Fair trade - From the WTO's setback at Seattle ... to the conditions for global governance - Food security and international trade negotiations - Completely sustainable development: an alternative to neo-liberal globalisation - Economic policies, ideologies and geo-cultural dimension - Women and economy - Economy of solidarity - Health and its challenges in the 21st century - The challenges of Artisan fishery in the 21st century - agriculture and sustainable development - People's right to feed themselves and achieve food sovereignty - Food security

### **Governance and citizenship**

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